DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 411 830 IR 056 657

AUTHOR Brown, Suzan A.
TITLE Marketing Principles as Applied to the Corporate Information Center.
PUB DATE 1996-00-00
NOTE 8p.; In: Online Information 96. Proceedings of the International Online Information Meeting (20th, Olympia 2, London, England, United Kingdom, December 3-5, 1996); see IR 056 631.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative (142) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Business; Information Industry; *Information Management; *Information Services; Information Transfer; Institutional Advancement; *Marketing; *Organizational Objectives; *Special Libraries; User Needs (Information)

ABSTRACT

Marketing principles, as applied by major businesses around the world, can also be used by information professionals to grow and expand their presence within their own organization. This paper focuses on parallels between marketing in the industrial/research arena, and the needs of information professionals to expand business from existing information center customers as well as expand into new markets in the corporation. Market research, product concept testing and customer surveys are discussed as proven marketing techniques. The importance of managing the entire information center product line and techniques for promoting key services of the information center are reviewed. It is emphasized that organizational objectives should be: specific (not a job description); results-oriented (not a list of activities); quantifiable and measurable; achievable within a definite time frame; and fewer than 10, and fitting on a single page. (Author/AEF)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 411 830

Marketing Principles as Applied to the Corporate Information Center

By:

Suzan A. Brown

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

B.P. Jeapes

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

TR056657

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Marketing principles as applied to the corporate information center

Suzan A. Brown
Director, Marketing, Chemical Abstracts Service, USA

Abstract: *Marketing principles, as applied by major businesses around the world, can also be used by information professionals to grow and expand their presence within their own organisation. Like the corporation itself, the information center must be concerned with budgets, production and satisfying 'customers'. It has also been true, since the beginning of corporate 'libraries', that information professionals have recognised a need to market their services. Marketing techniques that have worked for industry can also be employed successfully by information centres in reaching and influencing their in-house clientele. The paper will focus on parallels between marketing in the industrial/research arena, and the needs of information professionals to expand business from existing information center customers as well as expand into new markets in the corporation. Market research, product concept testing and customer surveys will be discussed as proven marketing techniques. The importance of managing the entire information center product line and techniques for promoting key services of the information center will be reviewed.*

Keywords: information center, information professionals, marketing, promotion

1. Introduction

Like it or not, marketing and all the activities that go with it are a prominent part of everyone's life these days. While you may not be a marketing professional yourself, you probably work for an organisation that markets a product or service. If nothing else, you are certainly exposed to someone else's marketing, most visibly in the form of advertising that confronts you at every turn. How many thousands of those messages you are exposed to during a typical weekday, no one can say for certain — but you see my point. What many information professionals may not realise, however, is that they themselves are engaged in marketing every day, and it should be a valuable tool in an enterprise so customer-dependent as a library or corporate information center. In light of that reality, it is important to recognise the marketing side of your work, embrace it, and use it to your best advantage.

2. Marketing and the information center

First, let's think about the word 'marketing', because it is a term you hear so often you may take the meaning for granted. Most people think of marketing as *advertising* or *selling* and, since both of those activities can be irritating when you are at the receiving end, marketing may have distasteful connotations for some people. In reality, marketing is much more than selling. It is an exchange of value in which both parties gain something, and virtually any organisation — even a university or a government or a church — is involved in offering value to a group of constituents. The difference between selling and marketing, as explained by Theodore Levitt in *The Marketing Imagination*, is that 'selling focuses on the needs of the seller, marketing on the needs of the buyer.' In that sense, Levitt goes on to say, marketing is concerned with 'satisfying the needs of the customers by means of the product and the whole cluster of things associated with creating, delivering, and finally consuming it' (Ref 1). To market effectively, you must first of all know the business your organisation is in, so you can contribute to its success.

Certainly, libraries or information centres have always been concerned withsatisfying the needs of their clientele and offering value in exchange for their support. In fact, a library exists for no other purpose — does an information center really exist if no one uses it? Well, not for long. Today more than ever, an information professional must be concerned with marketing his or her services within the organisation. I say 'more than ever' because there are more alternative sources of information than ever before. That means two things: (1) your clients need more help choosing among the alternatives, and (2) your information services face more competition. Those are classic marketing challenges faced by all kinds of organisations.

Your information center is a microcosm of the organisation to which it belongs. Like those who manage the organisation, you must be concerned with budgets, production, managing the product line, marketing and selling, and keeping your customers happy.

3. A sense of mission

Once you have come to recognise that your information center is a marketing enterprise, you begin to wonder how to do marketing. After all, this wasn't why you decided to study information science! How do you move toward being a marketer and not just the object of someone else's marketing? Largely, it is a matter of perspective and intention. Every good marketing plan begins with a mission statement, ideally an expression of purpose that applies to the entire organisation and is reflected in the plans of every organisational division, not just marketing. Some organisations don't have such a statement because they assume all their employees know what the corporate body is trying to accomplish. That assumption is a bit risky, however, because it is all too easy to lose site of the big picture in the clutter of details. If your company exists to produce cosmetics, then you must remember you are in the cosmetics business, not the information business *per se*. Your work is the means to an end. Think about the end result and use your company's mission statement as a guide to devise a mission statement specific to your own operation.

A mission statement should be brief — one sentence that asserts what you intend to accomplish. To paraphrase Walt Disney, the mission of Disneyland at one point was expressed as 'giving people such an enjoyable experience they will want to tell their friends about it and come back someday.' At Chemical Abstracts Service (CAS), to mention another example, our mission is to meet the needs of users of chemical and related scientific information world-wide. Possibly, your mission as an information specialist is similar, if you work for a company engaged in scientific research and development. I suggest you begin your marketing plans by crafting an information center mission statement that you can share with all your colleagues. Keep a few characteristics in mind as you write it: make your statement one sentence, express what you want to be, and acknowledge the people you are trying to serve. Obviously, the mission of your information center or department must be in sync with that of your organisation as a whole. If you or any of your staff don't know what that organisational mission is, find out right away!

Remember, it's only in terms of the organisation's overall mission that your own goals will be meaningful. Does your employer make pharmaceuticals, or agrochemicals, or does it teach students? Does it exist to improve health, or increase agricultural productivity, or educate scientists? How will your information center facilitate that work, improve the production process, reduce cost or otherwise contribute to the 'product'? Find out by talking to anyone in the organisation who can relate your work to their results. Then make it clear to everyone what you intend to contribute — that is your mission statement.

A good example of a corporate library mission statement was provided to us by the head of the Hewlett-Packard Research Library:

> 'to lead Research Services in the efficient and effective provision of information to HPLabs' employees in a manner that accelerates and fundamentally improves the research process' *Eugenie Prime, Manager of Corporate Libraries, Hewlett-Packard Company*

4. Defining your customers: market segmentation

In order to satisfy your customers, you must first identify them. This step is called market segmentation, and it has been described as follows by Hassan and Blackwell in *Global Marketing*:

> 'Segmentation is defined as the process of dividing the total market into subgroups for which a marketing mix that has special appeal to the most attractive (profitable) of the market segments can be developed' (Ref 2).

In other words, don't just say that you serve everyone in the company. Your clients are actually comprised of different subgroups or segments that have different needs. You may define many segments, and some are more important than others. Try to gauge their importance based on such criteria as the financial impact they represent, their strategic importance to your organisation, and their potential for innovation that you can help to realise, among other factors. The term 'marketing mix' refers to the set of activities that will influence these different groups. Different segments might include, for example:

- administrative management, concerned mainly with the organisation's overall productivity and viability; interested in activity of competitors, new business opportunities, regulatory requirements;
- R&D management, concerned with currency and completeness of scitech information; likely to have a special interest in patents;
- scientists and engineers, primarily interested in project-related information; narrowly focused on previous research in the same area but open to serendipity.

These are only some of the segments you might define. In some organisations, important groups would include the legal department, process engineering, quality control, the compliance officers, marketing, or you name it. In universities you would logically treat undergraduate students, graduate students and faculty as different segments. In all cases, segmentation depends on the interests you can identify that are common to a group and relate directly to your services. The act of identifying your customers necessarily includes assessing their needs. In short, it is their information needs that define them.

You can assess information needs one-on-one as you work with the customers that come to you. But what about the potential customers who never think about consulting the information center? For them, outreach may be necessary in the form of a consumer survey. This can be a simple questionnaire distributed in hardcopy, perhaps in your organisation's employee newsletter, or by e-mail. The questionnaire can be designed to assess the needs of both current and potential customers, and should address such issues as:

- satisfaction with current services offered;
- other services used (outside of your information center);
- perceived needs for other kinds of information or additional services;
- any way in which the information center can provide better service.

Interpreting the results of a survey deserves more discussion than can be addressed in this paper; however, it is worth noting some findings reported in a recent study by American Airlines. According to this study of airline customers:

- one unhappy customer tells 9 to 13 other customers about his or her bad experience;
- only four percent of unhappy customers complain to the company;
- for every person who complains, there are 24 other unhappy customers who don't say anything;
- 75–90% of unhappy customers who say nothing will never do business with the company again;
- 82–95% of those who complain will come back if their problem is resolved quickly (Ref 3).

Evidently, receiving even a few complaints can mean more dissatisfaction than you would like to believe! Dealing with the complaints you hear is crucial.

The act of distributing a survey will in itself draw attention to the existence of your service and encourage everyone to think about its potential for them. The survey should mention some of your information 'products', which we will now examine.

5. Defining your products

Considering the segments I've mentioned, among many others you might think of, one can envision different kinds of information products suitable to each group. Any of them may require a *comprehensive search* from time to time, a task that end-users are not well equipped to handle for themselves. This is especially true since online files have changed in some respects over time, for example indexing practices for a given database may have been different in the past. Moreover, in the case of Chemical Abstracts for example, an exhaustive search extending back beyond the mid 1960s would require searching printed indexes, too. Chemists who may perform simple searches online on their own quite effectively may need your help using a printed subject index from 1960.

You may find that certain clients could benefit from *an ongoing current awareness service* tailored to their continuing interests. This is especially likely for anyone involved in R & D, where breakthroughs are always in the making. For the project-oriented scientists, who are interested in new ideas as well as specific data, a *table of contents service* is a promising option. They may be amazed to discover that the advantages they once enjoyed browsing their favourite journals — for which their subscription fell victim to the cost-cutting axe — are now available in an online format. The point is, you are engaged in *service marketing*. You can help your customers not simply by giving them the information they have requested on a given day, but also by identifying services that will benefit them continually.

Consider how your mix of services might be revised. What functions do you do well? What else can you do easily? How do these compare with the key customer needs you've discovered?

Think about other kinds of service marketing you've encountered outside of work. Insurance agents, airlines, restaurants, even good auto repair shops go beyond serving your immediate request and look into your ongoing needs. Certainly that is a form of selling, but it means establishing a *customer relationship* that works to mutual advantage. What is it that distinguishes one bank from another? All offer the same basic services. You notice the difference mainly when something goes wrong — handling problems efficiently and gracefully is a big part of marketing any service.

Once you've begun to explore your clients' needs in more depth, you'll also begin to think of other products or services you can offer. Learn from what your colleagues are doing in other organisations, and use your imagination. Look to your competitors, too, and those might be independent information brokers. What can you offer that others might not do as well? You may even find that printed bulletins are still an excellent medium for some purposes! Among other things, they are good for summarising competitive information for management.

Just as any company would, you should test a major new product before launching it. Don't announce an 'answers on demand' capability to the company at large until you've tried it out with a small group of customers; otherwise, you may discover the demand is more than you can handle. Other factors to test for are cost, customer satisfaction, and the impact on other products or services you provide. Introducing a new alternative may lead to the demise of an existing product. That result may be acceptable, but you need to plan for it.

It may become necessary at some point to discontinue a service, and in terms of increasing your efficiency that can be just as important as creating one. When this becomes necessary in the course of product management, it presents a challenging customer relations problem because people tend to hold on to what they've become accustomed to receiving. Reasons to discontinue a service might involve several factors such

as impact on your costs, relationship to your mission, the 'fit' with other services you perform, or the importance of the groups or individuals using the service. 'Importance' is relative and subjective, but it's necessary to know who considers a service important and why.

What if the time consuming, printed clipping service you've been providing a certain manager is no longer possible because you've had to cut staff? Even a service that is seldom used seems to become essential once the customer realises you're going to discontinue it! While you explain the necessity of dropping the old service, offer some alternatives at the same time. Perhaps customising an automated electronic update service would provide an acceptable substitute.

Speaking of alternatives, I touched on competitive analysis before but it deserves emphasis. Take the trouble to know all about the alternatives to your own information service that your customers could conceivably choose. As an information professional, you need this type of analysis for two reasons: (1) you may want to incorporate some of those services into your own operation or (2) you may need to explain why your current offering is better. I suggest you prepare a table listing competitive services along one axis and features and benefits along the other, remembering that cost is an important benefit (or disadvantage). Competitors could mean online services you don't use for some reason, outside information brokers, and any alternative information source your customers might possibly use. That would include subscriptions to printed publications, primary or secondary. If you're asked why one alerting service is worth a dozen journal subscriptions, be prepared to answer with actual figures at the ready.

Deciding what services to offer, and how to offer them, depends a great deal on the *values* you wish to uphold: that is, the qualities you consider essential to your operation. You may decide that all your services will be delivered on time, cost-effectively, and with personal attention to the customer's satisfaction. If so, that commitment may affect the quantity and type of service you will offer.

To an increasing extent, the Internet is an important part of the information marketplace, and it relates directly to your sense of value. Some of your co-workers — and this may be especially true of scientists — probably believe the Internet is the ultimate solution to their information needs. They know they can submit questions to their colleagues on the Net and get quick answers about chemicals and many other topics of routine interest. Unlike you, they may not know the importance of indexing, document analysis and other value-added aspects of professionally built databases. And what about the reliability of the information sources, which may be far more important than currency or ease of access? Much of your role will always be education in these matters.

Don't think of the Internet as a threat, however, because the technology may result in new products that your information center can offer. If your organisation supports it, you should consider using the Intranet, an in-house Web site accessible only from within your organisation, that can distribute all kinds of information instantly with the advantages of electronic updating, graphic appeal, and ease of use we've come to associate with the World Wide Web. Imagine using such a tool to post news of interest throughout the company based on your company-specific monitoring of the competition. The Intranet is a new channel of communication worth a paper in itself, and it may become especially important to the corporate information center.

6. Objectives for marketing planning

Knowing your customers and their needs, you can proceed to set some concrete objectives for your information center. Your objectives will be unique to your situation but in any case objectives should be:

- specific (not a job description);
- results-oriented (not a list of activities);
- quantifiable and measurable;
- achievable within a definite time frame;
- fewer than 10 (and should fit on a single page).

Make them realistic and obtainable as well as challenging. Your mission statement devised earlier establishes the ultimate destination of your plan but you need to specify some quantifiable milestones to aim for on the way. The objectives are the core of a marketing plan that will lead you to success.

Consider some hypothetical objectives:

- *broaden customer base*:
  — conduct searches for 100 more customers than served in 1995;
  — begin serving a division we've never previously reached.
- *demonstrate value of information center*: document at least three information projects that resulted in $100,000 or more in increased revenue or cost savings for the company; distribute report to key managers by (date);
- *improve productivity*: train 50 scientists to conduct their own searches, thus freeing the information center staff for more complex searches.

After you've devised your objectives, don't keep them to yourself. Sharing them with staff and management will help you accomplish your goals. Others may offer to support you in ways you didn't even expect. Also, having publicised your objectives, you will automatically feel more committed to achieving them.

7. Selling and promotion

Once you've identified target markets, defined new and existing customers, set some objectives, and have devised the best suite of services you can, you need to publicise what you have to offer. As I've tried to demonstrate in this discussion, selling and promotion are not the first steps in a marketing plan but are properly brought into play near the end. In fact, you may do a substantial amount of pre-selling during the earlier process of assessing your customers' needs. After that, the whole arsenal of consumer promotion can be put to work. Information specialists we've worked with have used every technique you can imagine, including:

- posters at the 'point of sale' (e.g. outside your door) or wherever employees gather;
- occasional flyers or electronic messages distributed broadly;
- advertisements or articles in the company newsletter;
- information fairs that exhibit your services to all interested staff: some information professionals invite representatives from their vendors to exhibit at these in-house events, because their services are part of yours;
- give-away items reminding people how to reach you'
- product sampling, such as a free current-awareness search or an alerting service for a limited time period;
- promotional packaging, including identification of your information center on the search results you deliver;
- presentations to selected groups within the company.

Concerning the content of promotional messages, remember that everyone loves news, even if they hate advertising. So make your message sound like news. Even a service you've been offering forever will be news to many in your organisation, and there's always something new to say about it.

If some of this sounds too much like hucksterism for an information scientist, remember what your competitors are doing! Outside sources of information, including information brokers and other commercial services your co-workers might use for themselves, are constantly promoting to your customers. But since you are located on the scene, you have an enormous insider advantage. Make the best of it! Start by finding out how your customers found out about the other services, if they are in fact using them.

You may find it beneficial to position your outreach initiatives as education and identify them as such in your organisation. Arrange 'seminars' for relevant groups of potential customers in which you explain the array of information resources available and their benefits for the audience. Your event won't be perceived as a sales pitch but will nevertheless win new customers. The seminar approach is widely used in service marketing. Many pharmaceutical companies, for example, use it to reach physicians very effectively.

8. Know when it works

What you do after all this marketing effort is just as important as the effort itself. Measurement is essential, so you find out what worked and whether a given project was worth your expense. Follow up with your customers and invite feedback whenever possible. Do this is in a formal way that you can document. By that I mean not only asking customers what they thought of the search results you provided, but also the results of the results. Did an article or patent you found for a chemist lead him or her to a discovery in the lab? Or did it save a million in research and development by revealing that a certain chemical has already been patented or reported in the literature? Track the results carefully and then make sure everyone who counts knows about your success. This isn't just for job security, but will help your group to help your business. In the process, don't neglect thinking about efforts that fell short, because they can teach you as much as your triumphs. As any information provider will tell you, products that fail are very often those whose usefulness seemed obvious to the producer — so obvious the customers were never asked their opinion.

9. Conclusion

Think of your information center as a business in its own right with customers, a mission, competition, and a range of products and services to market. Use marketing techniques such as segmentation to identify your customers, set concrete goals for your marketing plan, and employ all available promotional and sales techniques within your organisation. Above all remember that an information professional is engaged in service marketing that depends on cultivating customer relationships. Solicit feedback, document your results, learn from what went wrong, and make your successes count toward the goals of your organisation.

Suzan A. Brown
Chemical Abstracts Service
2540 Olentangy River Road
Columbus
OH 43202
USA
Tel: +1 (614) 447 3600
Fax: +1 (614) 447 3709
E-mail: sbrown@cas.org

References

[1] Levitt, T. (1986) *The Marketing Imagination*, The Free Press, New York, p. 153.

[2] Hassan, S.S. and R.D. Blackwell (1994) *Global Marketing: Perspectives and Cases*, Harcourt Brace & Co., New York, p. 53.

[3] Barnett, C. (1996) How to complain effectively, *OAG Frequent Flyer*, July, 22–29.